The locations of homophobia

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This article explores what is at stake in contemporary practices of locating homophobia, as expressed in debates surrounding the Ugandan Anti Homosexuality Act. Problematising both neo-Orientalist representations of homophobia in Uganda and critical responses thereto, it draws on materialist, postcolonial and queer approaches to offer an account of the transnational production of homophobia that nonetheless accounts for its local resonance and resilience.

SPACE AND THE REPRESENTATION OF HOMOPHOBIA

The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA) publishes an annual report surveying the global extent of ‘State Sponsored Homophobia’. The report is accompanied by a series of maps, the most comprehensive of which depicts the spread of ‘Lesbian and Gay Rights in the World’. The map adopts a traffic light system of coding. It depicts states judged to be spaces of ‘persecution’ on account of their punishment of same-sex conduct with sentences of death or imprisonment in shades of red and orange. States in which the law is ambiguous, under challenge, or not explicitly homophobic but amenable to misuse, are coloured yellow. States according some degree of ‘recognition’ or ‘protection’ to same sex identities and unions are coloured in various shades of green. The orange, crimson and maroon tones draw the viewer’s attention towards ‘persecution’ states in the Caribbean, Africa

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(with the exception of some Francophone states and South Africa), the Middle East and parts of South and Southeast Asia.

Four features of this map are noteworthy. First, states are colour-coded against a spectrum of progress that charts a Western—more specifically, a northern European—temporal narrative moving from the achievement of what Robert Wintemute has called ‘basic rights’ to ‘sex rights’ to ‘love rights’. Besides noting the Eurocentrism of this narrative, we might also question the presentation of these gains as cumulative: Aeyal Gross has pointed out, by way of example, that marriage (a ‘love right’) curtails the very liberty that is the object of ‘prior’ struggles for ‘sex rights’. Second, although the ILGA report does not explicitly rank states, its visual presentation and some of its prose strongly suggests a ranking impulse. A more explicit ranking exercise can be found in the Pew Research Center’s 2013 survey of global attitudes towards sexuality, which orders states (by region) in terms of the percentage of respondents who reply affirmatively to the question: ‘Should Society Accept Homosexuality?’ The survey reports ‘broad acceptance of homosexuality in North America, the European Union, and much of Latin America, but equally widespread rejection in predominantly Muslim nations and in Africa, as well as in parts of Asia and in Russia’. Presumably the ranking tenor of these reports, whether explicit or implied, is intended to motivate states to improve their laws on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) rights by applauding those who move in the direction of progress and by shaming those who do not. The success of such a strategy relies on a consensus on the meaning of progress and the desirability of reaching the goals that mark its attainment. But where value disagreements are at issue—where one state’s ‘progress’ is another’s ‘moral decay’—the shaming potential of such lists is less apparent. The proliferation of shaming lists constructed around rights concerning sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) despite the evident absence of value consensus on these issues suggests a belief, on the part of the makers of such lists, in a potential to embarrass that derives from something other than agreement on the meaning.

3 See, e.g., D Sanders, ‘Asia these days’, in Itaborahy & Zhu (2013) 63, 64 (‘Which country will lead [on civil unions or marriage in Asia]? The horse race at the moment features Nepal, Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam. Place your bets!’); T Adrian, ‘When Latin American “Cosmic race” starts to lead LGBTI issues’, in Itaborahy & Zhu (2013) 84.
5 Ibid.
and value of the very categories of SOGI that are at issue here. I suggest that
these ranking exercises mobilise shame, not on the basis of the substantive
values at stake in these disputes, but through a reiteration of familiar divides
between shamers and shamed. That the novelty of SOGI issues can nonetheless
reproduce old divides between the civilised and the savage, makes these lists and
maps neo-Orientalist artefacts.6

Third, the ILGA map and survey privilege formal legal provisions govern-
ing sexuality over the lived experience of queer subjects. The disjunction be-
tween these criteria becomes apparent in Kevin Ward’s comparison of South
Africa and Uganda, which notes the paradoxical combination of progressive law
with high levels of violence against queer subjects in the former, and regressive
law but lower levels of violence in the latter.7 Because of its focus on formal
norms, the ILGA project cannot make sense of these contradictions, colouring
South Africa green on account of its recognition of same-sex marriage and
Uganda red for its criminalisation of same-sex sexuality. Fourth, the ILGA
(and Pew) surveys rest on state-centric ontological premises. By this I mean
not only that they take the state as the basic unit of analysis but also that each
country-specific section, in describing the norms and actors implicated in the
production of homophobia within that country, assumes that the effects of
those norms and actors are felt only locally. The very structure of the report,
divided as it is into chapters offering regional overviews and containing coun-
try-specific blurbs, reinforces the impression that homophobia can be under-
stood purely with reference to actors located within the boundaries of the
nation-state. This recalls Anne Orford’s account of the imaginative geography
of humanitarian intervention in which state failure is attributed primarily to
local factors with ‘the international community [remaining] absent from the
scene of violence and suffering until it intervenes as a heroic saviour’.8 The
spatial imaginary concretised by the ILGA map is now ubiquitous.9 Indeed the
Orientalism of this imaginary has shaped ‘Orientals’ themselves: activists in

6 See, e.g., J Binnie, The Globalization of Sexuality (SAGE Publications, 2004) 68, for an early recog-
nition of this.

7 K Ward, ‘Religious Institutions and Actors and Religious Attitudes to Homosexual Rights: South
Africa and Uganda’, in C Lennox & M Waites (eds), Human Rights, Sexual Orientation and Gender
Identity in the Commonwealth: Struggles for Decriminalisation and Change (Institute of

8 A Orford, Reading Humanitarian Intervention: Human Rights and the Use of Force in International

9 See, e.g., the interactive map on the home page of Human Dignity Trust, available at http://www.
humandignitytrust.org/ (last visited 8 November 2013); UNAIDS, ‘Towards a free and equal world’,
(last visited 10 January 2014).
India, for example, have reproduced these spatial imaginaries in advocacy materials that, piggybacking on hegemonic narratives of India’s transition to ‘rising power’ status, effectively urge the Indian state to detach itself from a homophobic Third World and embrace the LGBT-friendly modernity represented by the West.\(^9\)

Visually centre-stage in these maps, and historically the repository for European anxieties about backwardness and savagery, Africa occupies a prominent place in cartographical and other depictions of homophobia. Since 2009, Uganda has been a particularly intense focus of attention thanks to the Anti Homosexuality Bill (AHB) that was introduced in that year, passed on 20 December 2013, and accorded presidential assent on 24 February 2014, thereby becoming the Anti Homosexuality Act (AHA).\(^1\) The Act enhances punishments for same-sex conduct and criminalises any form of organisation or advocacy in support of rights for homosexuals. The original Bill earned notoriety for its proposed introduction of the death penalty for a category of offences named ‘aggravated homosexuality’—defined as same-sex conduct in which the ‘victim’ is a minor or disabled, or the ‘offender’ is HIV-positive or a ‘serial offender’. In the version of the Bill that was ultimately passed, the death penalty was amended to life imprisonment.\(^2\)

In the coverage of homophobia in Africa, and Uganda specifically, that has followed these developments, narrative strategies for the consolidation of the spatial imaginaries of which maps provide a snapshot have become visible. A BBC documentary aired in May 2011, rhetorically titled ‘The World’s Worst Place to Be Gay?’, is illustrative of these strategies.\(^3\) Made by gay British DJ Scott Mills, its effective characterisation of Uganda as a contemporary gay heart of darkness is undoubtedly aided by the country’s proximity to that original heart of darkness immortalised in Joseph Conrad’s eponymous novel, as well as by imaginative texts revisiting more recent episodes of authoritarianism and

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brutality in Ugandan politics. The documentary series *Out There* presented by British writer and actor Stephen Fry and aired in November 2013, suggests that little has changed in mainstream media reportage of these issues despite an outpouring of critique and more nuanced representation. Viewed together, these documentaries suggest the ingredients of a well-established formula in the investigative reporting of ‘non-Western homophobia’, featuring the white, Western journalist as speaker of truth to homophobic power.

The premise for both documentaries is the visit of a well-known gay British personality to Uganda, ostensibly to explore and understand the phenomenon of homophobia. Both documentaries are book-ended by comparisons with Britain, which is imagined as a space of gay freedom. While Fry’s documentary opens with scenes from a gay civil partnership ceremony in the UK, Mills’s film begins in a pub in London’s gay district, Soho, where, pictured in amiable conversation with his drinking buddies, Mills vigorously denies that he has ever encountered homophobia. After obligatory caveats about the relative novelty of Britain’s gay friendliness, comes the clincher: ‘But compared to elsewhere, we’re a model of tolerance’. As if to confirm Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s critique of the gaze of white western feminism, the remark acknowledges a central purpose of international comparison and concern to be the extraction of a hierarchy in which the western self finds proof of its emancipation and worth in the shackles of its non-western other. When a gay Ugandan exile in Britain, John Bosco Nyombi, narrates his experience of persecution in Uganda, Mills can only reply: ‘our experiences are completely different, ‘coz I had a really easy time growing up, being gay. It wasn’t an issue for me at all’. Nyombi responds incredulously: ‘It looks like we are on different planets.’

Missing in Mills’s film is the story of Nyombi’s struggles with the British Home Office in his long and arduous quest for asylum in the UK from persecution on the basis of sexual orientation. The film ends with Mills’s observation, once again, after obligatory caveats about the vibrancy and colour of life in Uganda, that ‘if it stayed like it is, I couldn’t see myself ever wanting to come back’. Expressing pessimism about the prospects for change, he reflects that ‘what [the trip] has done is made me realise how lucky I am’.

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Both films feature some of the same people from amongst Kampala’s out kuchu community. Prominent among them is Stosh Mugisha, a trans man, who narrates his experience of being raped as a 14-year-old-girl, and, as a result, becoming pregnant, HIV positive and suicidal. Fry follows this harrowing account with the comment ‘[y]our life encapsulates almost every detail of the gay experience in Uganda’, implying that Stosh’s story is in some way typical of Ugandan kuchu life. The effects of this elevation of individual biography to national narrative are exacerbated when the same individual is profiled as representative of a community in multiple media narratives. Doubtless part of the reason some biographies are frequently reiterated is that few people are willing to run the risks inherent in speaking out publically; the effect, however, is to make Stosh representative of Uganda, in the same way that Mills and Fry become metonyms for Britain.

At the heart of this article is the question of what is at stake in contemporary practices of locating homophobia. Central to the maps and films I have been discussing here is a spatial imaginary in which certain places are imagined as locations of homosexual freedom and others as locations of homophobia. Ironically, the imaginative geography of neo-Orientalist LGBT activists is shared by the very conservatives who are their chief antagonists: the claim that homosexuality is Western and therefore culturally inauthentic, is frequently at the centre of non-Western discourses of homophobia. Inherent in this shared geographical imaginary is a tight linkage between sexuality, place and legitimacy, in which particular attitudes towards sexuality (and indeed particular sexualities) become markers of belonging to particular places. Neville Hoad complicates this analysis by drawing our attention to the spatialisation of time and the temporalisation of space in this imaginary, whereby non-Western places are imagined as contemporary re-enactments of Western pasts: ‘we were like them, but have developed, they are like we were and have yet to develop’. These tropes are particularly visible in West/non-West comparative moments that masquerade as gestures of solidarity in a shared struggle.

18 The term ‘kuchu’ has become the preferred identity description of choice for many Ugandan lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) individuals. It is not used in either of the films I discuss here, but supplies the title of Call Me Kuchu, dirs KF Wright & M Zouhali-Worrall (2012).

19 The original Anti Homosexuality Bill clarified its aims as including the protection of ‘the cherished culture of the people of Uganda, legal, religious, and traditional family values of the people of Uganda against the attempts of sexual rights activists seeking to impose their values of sexual promiscuity on the people of Uganda’ (§ 1.1). For evidence of the ubiquity of this claim in discourses of state, church and media in Uganda, see S Tamale (ed.), Homosexuality: Perspectives from Uganda (Sexual Minorities Uganda, 2007).

In what follows, I turn to alternative—and differently problematic—locations of homophobia to understand what is at stake in the practice of location. In the next section, I examine narratives that attribute the apparent upsurge of homophobia in Uganda to its importation from the West. Here I diagnose a different problem: in turning their critical gaze towards the West, such narratives obscure the agency of Africans in the production of homophobia, or reduce accounts of such agency to one of manipulation by Western actors, begging questions about the values and beliefs of African elites and subalterns alike. Drawing on postcolonial theory and historical materialist geography for an understanding of ‘place’ as constituted by transnational flows but also as resistant to easy reconstitution, the following section offers a modified account of the transnational production of homophobia in Uganda that underscores the indispensable agency of Ugandan elites. The final section offers some concluding observations on the relationship between place and sexuality and makes two suggestions about the contours of a progressive politics: first, that such a politics might seek a dispersion—rather than location—of homophobia; and second, that rather than abandoning the notion of progress, such a politics might be attentive to the ways in which no place has a monopoly on the ideational construction of progress.

**THE ‘IMPORTATION’ OF HOMOPHOBIA**

One response to the claim that homosexuality is a Western import has been the assertion that most postcolonial states with homophobic laws inherited them from their Western colonial predecessors. In this regard, the legacy of British colonialism has become a particular focus of attention.21 French colonies were largely spared the anti-sodomy provision because it had been dropped from the Napoleonic code in 1806 before many of them were conquered; this code also influenced France’s European neighbours and their colonies.22 One recent study notes that ‘the Commonwealth includes 42 (53.8%) of the 78 states which continue to criminalise same-sex sexual behaviour, and only 12 (10.6%) of 113 where it is legal’, concluding that ‘the criminalisation of

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same-sex sexual behaviour by the British Empire, and associated colonial culture, have had a lasting negative impact. 23 Michael Kirby, former Justice of the High Court of Australia, speaks of sexual minorities being ‘kept in legal chains by the enduring penal code provisions of the British Empire’.24 British LGBT activist Peter Tatchell goes further in declaring that these provisions ‘are not authentic national laws that were freely legislated by the indigenous populations’.25

In one sense, claims that both homosexuality and homophobia are imports from the West are historically plausible. Central to contemporary scholarship on sexuality is a distinction between sexual behaviour/practice and identity. As akshay khanna explains, the very notion of ‘having’ a sexual identity is premised on the idea that ‘who I fuck or am attracted to says something about the type of person I am’.26 This distinction has made it possible to assert both the universality of homosexual behaviour and the cultural specificity of sexual minority identities. Michel Foucault located the emergence of sexuality as identity in modern European discourses of religion, law, medicine and literature.27 John D’Emilio’s materialist account does not dispute the timing of this emergence, but explains these new discursive formations as responses to the effects of capitalism and urbanisation on the family.28 Under the influence of one or both of these dual logics, more recent scholarship has attributed the diffusion of Western-originated sexual minority identities to the non-Western world to a range of vectors including capitalism,29 human rights activism,30 and

24 Kirby (2013) 75.
29 D Altman, Global Sex (University of Chicago Press, 2001).
If the affects that are typically grouped under the sign of ‘homophobia’ are themselves premised on the cultural intelligibility of ‘homosexuality’, then it may be historically plausible to think of homophobia as also being a cultural import.

Yet while the import narrative may be historically accurate as an originary account of law and affect—and has a certain tactical utility in contexts where homosexuality is alleged to be culturally inauthentic—it fails to account for the embrace and resignification of these laws by postcolonial elites, and the persistence or emergence of homophobia in many postcolonial societies decades after the end of colonialism. Former colonies have taken ownership of sodomy laws in a variety of ways: some have decriminalised sodomy or are in the process of doing so (Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, Bahamas, Cyprus, South Africa, Vanuatu, Fiji); others have widened the ambit of anti-sodomy laws to criminalise sex between women (Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Malawi), to enhance already existing punishments (Uganda), or to introduce new offences (Nigeria); and still others have introduced anti-sodomy legislation after decolonisation (Cameroon, Benin, Senegal). Moreover, if ‘homophobia’ is historically tied to an imported sexual ontology, it may be too narrow a term to encompass locally-rooted affects that express hatred of the queer. The claim that ‘homophobia’ is Western may therefore be true but trivial, if it cannot take cognisance of this wider realm of indigenous phobic affect.

Analytical failures apart, there is something politically troubling about the way in which the historical reminder of sodomy laws as an inheritance from British colonialism is turned into an argument for Britain to play a leading role in their removal, particularly in the institutional arena of the Commonwealth. In the run-up to the 2011 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Perth, Tatchell called on British Prime Minister David Cameron to apologise for Britain’s imposition of the sodomy law on its colonies. Under pressure from activists, Cameron responded with an ill-advised comment suggesting that British aid would be linked to respect for LGBT rights in recipient countries. Confronted with the spectre of a renewed civilising mission in which the erstwhile imperial power and its white dominions berated the black and brown Commonwealth for their backwardness, the statement

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aroused hostile reactions from political and religious leaders in Tanzania, Uganda, Ghana and elsewhere. More significantly, a number of African activists publically dissociated themselves from this articulation of ‘gay conditionality’, warning that the refusal of aid on sexual rights grounds would result in the scapegoating of queers in recipient countries potentially provoking a backlash against them, besides reinforcing perceptions of the ‘westernness’ of homosexuality and further entrenching imperial relationships between donor and recipient countries.

The claim that homophobia is an import from the West has also been prominent in discussion of Uganda’s AHA, which has widely been attributed to the malign influence of US Christian evangelical missionaries in Africa. The genesis of the AHA has, in many accounts, been traced to the visit to Kampala in March 2009 of US anti-gay evangelicals Scott Lively, Don Schmierer and Caleb Brundidge, to speak at a ‘Seminar on Exposing the Homosexual Agenda’ during which they elaborated on the putative evils of homosexuality. A number of the themes discussed at that seminar, including the threat that homosexuality supposedly posed to marriage and the family, and the propensity of homosexuals to recruit children into their ‘lifestyle’, were reiterated in the text of the AHB tabled seven months later in the Ugandan Parliament by MP David Bahati, who reportedly has close links with The Family, a powerful and secretive US-based political Christian organisation.

Kapya Kaoma, a Zambian priest and scholar currently based in the US, has argued in two influential reports that the homophobia underpinning

legislative initiatives such as the AHA is ‘collateral damage’ from the US culture wars exported to Africa. In Kaoma’s argument, finding themselves on the losing side of key debates around the ordination of women and homosexuals as bishops or the blessing of same-sex unions, conservatives within mainline Episcopal, Methodist and Presbyterian churches in the US have begun to forge global alliances with the more socially conservative branches of their denominations, principally in sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and Southeast Asia. Forged through the medium of money distributed through evangelical development and humanitarian charities, these alliances serve two purposes from the point of view of their US participants. First, they empower conservatives to dominate the governing bodies of these denominations, enabling them to block progressive moves towards the consecration of women and/or queer bishops, the recognition of same-sex marriage, etc. The decennial Lambeth conference, a key deliberative forum for the worldwide Anglican Communion, has been a prominent arena of struggle in this regard (in ways that I will revisit in the next section). Second, they also provide spiritual refuge for dissident conservative evangelical Christians in the US. This has become particularly evident in a series of moves visible within the Anglican Communion, the constitutionality of which remains unclear. Dissatisfied with the liberal drift of their ‘province’ (as branches of the Anglican Communion are called) and provoked, in particular, by the consecration of the gay and openly non-celibate Gene Robinson as Bishop of New Hampshire in 2003, some conservative parishes in the US have broken with the Episcopal Church and placed themselves under the ‘spiritual oversight’ of bishops in countries like Nigeria, Rwanda, Kenya and Uganda. Simultaneously, some African churches severed their relationship with the Episcopal Church and announced themselves to be in communion with its rival province—the newly-formed Anglican Mission in the Americas. Central to these complex constitutional moves has been the decision of conservatives not to leave the Communion (which would effectively concede defeat to the liberals) but to legitimate their dissidence with the blessing of conservative bishops in global South provinces.

What emerges from Kaoma’s meticulous research is a transactional relationship in which the Americans supply money in return for the political support and ‘spiritual protection’ of the Africans. Homophobia, in this analysis, is imported into Uganda from the US and foisted onto materially needy clergy

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and congregations through the lure of conservative money. (Incidentally, this argument neatly mirrors the discourse of Ugandan conservatives, who insist that homosexuals and LGBT organisations use Western donor funds to ‘recruit’ vulnerable individuals into homosexuality. 41) While providing a valuable corrective to the neo-Orientalist view of an essential and irredeemable ‘African homophobia’, Kaoma’s relentless pursuit of the money trail nonetheless begs questions about the values and beliefs of the African clergy who are central to the relationships that underpin the ongoing institutionalisation of homophobia in Uganda. Indeed, liberal critiques such as those offered by Kaoma have elicited the conservative retort that they are racist in their insinuation that African clergy are pliable instruments of American will, prepared to sell their allegiance and reshape their moral and theological worldviews in deference to the wishes of their funders.

The recent film God Loves Uganda, with which Kaoma is associated, reinforces this problematic image. 42 The film explores the relationship between evangelical Christians in Uganda and the US, principally by following a cohort of young missionaries from the International House of Prayer, a Pentecostal Christian mission organisation based in Missouri, in their first evangelical ventures in Uganda. Purporting to cast a non-judgmental eye on the organisation through candid glimpses of worship and a series of rather self-incriminating interviews with key figures, the film offers a chilling portrait of the missionaries as earnest and well-meaning but delusional and oblivious to the havoc they are wreaking in Uganda through the propagation of a homophobic gospel. While the film features prominent exponents of homophobia as well as LGBT activists and allies, I am particularly interested in its portrayal of ‘ordinary’ ‘Africans’. In one interview Kaoma, speaking of the activities of the US missionaries explains: ‘when they start demonising another person, the poor African thinks that’s how things should be’. The publicity material and visual branding of the film prominently features a photograph that exemplifies its overall message. 43 In it, a bearded white missionary in a black shirt holds a black African child wearing a soiled white vest. The man has one hand clasped over the child’s head and his eyes are closed as if to suggest someone deep in prayer. The child looks straight at the camera, wary but still. The message is clear: Africa is an innocent, damaged child, America the powerful and manipulative adult.


42 God Loves Uganda, dir. RR Williams (2013).

While Ugandan LGBT activists have been complicit in co-producing this narrative of homophobia as a Western import, not least because of its tactical utility in rebutting the charge of homosexuality as Western, some have begun to express disquiet about the way in which such a narrative minimises the agency of Ugandans in their own politics. Expressing scepticism of the import narrative, legal academic and activist Sylvia Tamale quotes a proverb in Luganda ‘Kyewayagaliza embazzi kibuyaga asude’, meaning literally ‘the tree you wanted to chop down has been uprooted by a thunderstorm’. She translates this as ‘[c]hance favours a prepared mind’.44 This effectively reframes the question that needs to be asked: what has prepared Ugandan audiences to be receptive to the gospel of homophobia, whether imported or indigenous?

PLACING HOMOPHOBIA: A QUEER POSTCOLONIAL MATERIALIST VIEW

Underlying the troubling representations of homophobia that I have surveyed in the previous two sections is a tight linkage between sexuality, place and legitimacy, in which particular attitudes towards sexuality (and particular sexualities) become markers of belonging to particular places. At issue in these representations are not only problematic understandings of sexuality, but also simplistic deployments of the very notion of ‘place’. In a survey of the literature on place, Marxist geographer David Harvey identifies an important tension between views that value the closedness of place as enabling the incubation of genuine alternatives to capitalism and imperialism, and those that worry that this very closedness can engender an exclusionary politics of fascism. Relational accounts, seeking to escape the logic of closed territories, understand place as defined not by the content its boundaries enclose but by the specific mix of links between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ that constitute it. Ultimately, Harvey finds most useful Alfred Whitehead’s understanding of places as entities that achieve relative stability in their bounding and internal ordering for a time, occupying a piece of space in an exclusive way for that time. Describing such entities as ‘permanences’, Whitehead understood place-formation as the process of ‘carving out “permanences” from a flow of processes’.45 Such a view mediates the tensions described above by insisting on the role of flows in the constitution of place, while also resisting the insinuation that places can be easily reconstituted

45 D Harvey, Cosmopolitanism and the Geographies of Freedom (Columbia UP, 2009) 189-90.
by new flows once they have achieved a certain stability in their bounding and internal ordering.46

Postcolonial theory productively complicates this view of place. Edward Said offers a powerful alternative to the imaginative geography of Orientalism. Pioneering a technique that he calls ‘contrapuntal reading’ in which cultural identities are conceived, not as essentialisms, but as contrapuntal ensembles in which identities cannot exist without an array of opposites, Said reads a number of ostensibly metropolitan texts in ways that reveal the constitutive role of colonial peripheries in their production, reconceiving the imperial encounter as one of ‘overlapping territories, intertwined histories’. We are reminded, for example, that it is Australian wealth that enables the Great Expectations that Pip entertains, that the order and civility of Jane Austen’s Mansfield Park are enabled by surpluses from slave plantations in Antigua, and that Giuseppe Verdi’s Aida was commissioned by the Khedive of Egypt to celebrate the inauguration of his new opera house in Cairo—itself intended as a symbol of a modernising Egypt’s entry into international society.47 Core and periphery are constituted by flows of people, commodities, money and ideas, but importantly, the flows take place in both directions with consequences for both places, allowing for a recognition of the agency of the periphery in constituting the modern world.48

Bearing in mind these more complicated ways of understanding ‘place’, we can return to the question of how homosexuality and homophobia come to be associated with particular places. Consideration of this question in queer and postcolonial theory, particularly insofar as Africa is concerned, has long been vexed by the figure of Frantz Fanon. Fanon’s account of what Kobena Mercer calls the ‘libidinal economy of Negrophobia’ is shot through with homophobia as a result of its tendency to explain racism as a concomitant of sexual perversion (it is not clear which triggers the other).49 Fanon describes the racist white imaginary as reducing the Negro to the sexual and the biological: ‘In relation to the Negro, everything takes place on the genital level.’ 50 In this imaginary, Negrophobia is an expression of both fear of, and desire for, rape by the Negro: ‘the Negrophobic woman is in fact nothing but a putative sexual

46 Ibid.
47 E Said, Culture and Imperialism (Vintage, 1994).
partner—just as the Negrophobic man is a repressed homosexual’. We must contextualise Fanon’s claims, as Diana Fuss does, as responses to a colonial sexual economy that exploited the sexual services of black people, used sexual humiliation and torture as instruments of subjugation, and endlessly reproduced the myth of the violent, lawless, oversexed black rapist. Fanon would also have been aware of, and reacting to, the then common equation of the homosexual/’invert’ and the primitive in Freudian sexology.  

These discursive contexts notwithstanding, two features of Fanon’s argument remain troubling. The first is the association of homosexuality with whiteness. In a footnote, Fanon remarks that he has not observed ‘homosexuality’ in his native Martinique, although he concedes the presence of gender-transitive individuals while nonetheless insisting that ‘they lead normal sex lives’. The only Martinicans who become homosexuals are those who travel to Europe, but only as a means of earning their living in a society that will offer them few other opportunities: homosexuality here is a function of white exploitation. Second, the inability to imagine a same-sex encounter that is not cross-racial rape means that ‘homosexuality’ is inserted in a violent cultural relation where ‘homophobia’ properly belongs. As Lee Edelman has pointed out: ‘where it is “given” that white racism equals castration and “given” that homosexuality equals castration, then it is proper to conclude that white racism equals (or expresses through displacement) homosexuality and, by the same token, in a reversal of devastating import for lesbians and gay men of color, homosexuality equals white racism’. Scholars of African sexualities have traced the misogynistic and homophobic afterlives of this Fanonian argument in the politics of African liberation movements. Thus, having experienced colonialism as emasculation, movements such as the Zimbabwe African National Union sought to recuperate a putatively lost African male virility through violence against women and against men who were regarded as having betrayed the dignity of African masculinity by having sex with other men.

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51 Ibid 156.
52 To cite only one illustration from the African colonial context, survivors of the brutal repression of the Kenyan Mau Mau uprising report having been raped and castrated as punishment for their alleged participation in the rebellion. 


54 Fanon (1986) 180, note 44.
Rather than consolidating the linkage between homophobia and postcolonial nationalism, I want to make a different argument here. Perhaps the most profound contribution of Jasbir Puar’s work has been her account of the splitting of queerness in its encounter with imperial US nationalism, resulting in the selective incorporation of queerness sanctioned through gender/race/class sanitising, and the quarantining of other forms of queerness in the production of a monster-terrorist-fag that is the nation’s Other. I want to suggest that the converse of this insight has not been adequately recognised. In struggles against empire, homophobia has had a plasticity and versatility analogous to that attributed to queerness in Puar’s argument, enabling its conjunction with both imperial collaboration and anticolonial nationalism. I make this argument for a number of reasons. First, understanding the range of audiences and contradictory political interests that homophobia serves can alert us to the sources of its hegemony. Second, undermining the exclusive linkage of homophobia with postcolonial nationalism might begin to erode this hegemony. Third, I take seriously the cautions that scholars of African sexualities have expressed against continental generalisations. The view I offer here of a shape-shifting homophobia that can place itself on the side of both imperial collaboration and anti-colonial nationalism seems more attuned to the history of Uganda. In what follows, I present two key moments in which the transnational flows that constitute the ‘permanence’ that gets called ‘Ugandan homophobia’ become visible. I pay particular attention to the agency of Baganda/Ugandan elites in enabling these flows. In the first of these moments, ‘homophobia’ functions in the service of imperial collaboration; in the second, it is an expression of decolonisation. The perspective I offer integrates the materialist, postcolonial and queer theoretical approaches that I have outlined above.

‘Homophobia’ as imperial collaboration

The Kabakas (kings) of 19th-century Buganda, the largest of the pre-colonial kingdoms merged to form present-day Uganda, permitted their subjects to convert to Islam and Christianity for reasons that continue to be debated by analogous argument in the context of the South African anti-apartheid movement, see C Stychin, A Nation By Rights: National Cultures, Sexual Identity Politics, and the Discourse of Rights (Temple UP, 1998) ch. 3.


historians. Some view the decision as a means of cultivating ties with the outside world that would facilitate modernisation, or as a canny attempt on the part of Mutesa I (1856-1884) to introduce new religions that would offset indigenous gods who were independent, and subversive, of royal authority. Others emphasise the spiritual yearnings of the Baganda elite whose worldview had been shattered by inexplicable disasters—epidemics, drought, famine and military defeat—making them unusually receptive, relative to other flourishing tribal societies, to new cosmologies. By the time Mwanga II ascended the throne in 1884 at the age of 17, he inherited a court that was sharply polarised between different religious factions, each of which stood in varying degrees of alliance with external powers encroaching on Buganda in the ongoing scramble for Africa. The Protestants were close to the British, the Catholics to the Germans, and the Muslims to the sultan of Zanzibar; traditionalists in the court viewed all three groups with suspicion. Less adept than his father at balancing these contending factions, Mwanga struggled to retain his authority. It is against this fraught geopolitical backdrop that missionary interest in Mwanga’s bodily intimacies assumes particular significance.

Missionary sources from the time express horror at the ‘abominable vices’ and ‘shameful passions’ that allegedly stalked Mwangas court, with the Kabaka himself described as being addicted to ‘the practice of homosexuality’. When Joseph Mukasa Balikuddembe, leader of the Catholic pages at the court, took it upon himself to protect the new converts from the Kabaka’s carnal solicitations, Mwanga ordered his execution in November 1885 to punish this unprecedented challenge to his authority. Failing to quell insubordination, Mwanga ordered a more thoroughgoing execution of all the Christians in his court who refused to renounce their allegiance to the Anglican and Catholic missionaries. On 3 June 1886, 31 people were burned to death at Namugongo (near present-day Kampala). While attentive to the broader geopolitical context prevailing at the time, the most authoritative source that continues to supply the hegemonic textual narrative of these events insists that “To gloss over the unpleasant vice to which Mwanga was addicted would be to disregard the decisive factor in the


61 JF Faupel, African Holocaust: The Story of the Uganda Martyrs (Geoffrey Chapman, 1965) 9-10. See, e.g., Rev. RP Ashe, Two Kings of Uganda; Or, Life By the Shores of Victoria Nyanza, Being an Account of A Residence of Six Years in Eastern Equatorial Africa (Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1890) 101.
story of the persecutions." The killings continued sporadically until March 1888, rousing a coalition of Muslims, Catholics and Protestants in opposition to Mwanga who was deposed in September that year. In the civil wars that ensued, the Protestants eventually gained the upper hand with the assistance of the Imperial British East African Company (IBEAC), paving the way for the institution of British rule over Uganda. Meanwhile, the French Catholic order of the White Fathers had initiated proceedings for the beatification and canonisation of the murdered pages, a process that reached fruition in 1964 when Pope Paul VI declared as saints the 22 Catholics who were amongst the murdered pages of 1886.

Queer theorists have been here before. In a brilliant reading of these events, Neville Hoad cautions against imposing a ‘sexual’ interpretation on the narrative, notwithstanding the rhetoric of abomination with which the missionary sources are replete. Beginning from a premise of uncertainty about the social meanings that the ‘corporeal intimacies’ that Mwanga indulged in with his pages had for his contemporaries, Hoad speculates that practices that might have served ritual, religious, initiatory, fealty-producing and/or other public functions may have been recorded and re-coded by 19th-century European missionaries as ‘sex’, steeped as they were in discourses of perverse sexuality that were emerging contemporaneously in Europe. Whatever the meaning of these practices—for which even ‘intimacy’ may be too presumptuous a description—their non-observance seems to have functioned as a marker of disloyalty to the Kabaka, provoking his violent reaction. Hoad resists a modern sexual identitarian reading of the events of the 1880s. Yet with one eye on contemporary homophobic discourses casting same-sex behaviour as a western import, he reminds us that ‘it was precisely these practices that were stamped out by an earlier wave of European imperialism’. Mwanga emerges from his argument as a heroic figure ‘who fucked (with the full and bizarre semantic range of that verb) both Christianity and imperialism and ultimately lost.’

While Hoad’s Mwanga is a queer, anti-imperialist patriot, we hear rather less in this argument about the forces ranged against him, and specifically about native elites working in opposition to him. It is here, I suggest, that we can see

62 Faupel (1965) 82.
63 JP Thoonen, Black Martyrs (Sheed & Ward, 1941) 282-91.
something akin to homophobia operating in the service of imperial collaboration. Indeed paying attention to Kiganda agency throws into question some of the ways in which the martyrdoms have been ‘queered’ by recent scholarship. For one thing, it is misleading to think of Christianity as a colonial imposition on the Baganda: Mutesa’s epistolary invitation to Western missionaries, published in the Daily Telegraph of London in 1875, is well known—although it is entirely likely that the missionaries would have come uninvited, as they did elsewhere. More particularly, it is crucial to enquire into pre-colonial Kiganda attitudes towards ‘sodomy’, to the extent possible, without assuming that these were easily overwritten by colonial Christian mores. Here my argument is speculative, but reading between the lines of missionary and other contemporary sources brings troubling aporias into view. In his account of the Catholic procedures that culminated in the intermediate step of beatification of the martyrs in 1920, JP Thoonen records an important discrepancy between witness depositions at a first tribunal hearing held in November 1887, and those made before a second tribunal in 1913-1914. The first depositions are silent on the issue of Mwanga’s ‘shameful passions’, although these find mention in the introductory statements of the missionaries. In contrast, all the witnesses appearing before the second tribunal cited this issue as a cause of Mwanga’s hostility to the Christians. While these discrepancies do not shake Thoonen’s faith in the centrality of ‘sodomy’ to the narrative of the martyrdoms, we must wonder, first, whether the lack of reference to Mwanga’s corporeal behaviour by the native witnesses appearing before the first tribunal implies that they found it unremarkable; and second, whether the shift in the nature of testimony given by the witnesses before the two tribunals suggests a process of witness tutoring by the missionaries with a view to improving the prospects for successful canonisation.

Interestingly, the missionary accounts are keen to emphasise that sodomy was not only unchristian, but also abhorred by the Baganda. The source on which they rely to make this claim is a text on the customs of the Baganda by Apolo Kagwa, widely considered Buganda’s first native ethnographer. But Kagwa is no disinterested anthropologist. Barely escaping the purges, he emerged as a leader of the Protestant faction before going on to become perhaps the key collaborator with the IBEAC and its agent Frederick (later Lord) Lugard,

65 I use the clumsy formulation ‘something akin to homophobia’ because the very notion of ‘homophobia’ will only just have begun to become intelligible in this historical moment, as the practitioner of sodomy (Mwanga) is individuated in the missionary discourse of the time as a ‘homosexual’.

66 Thoonen (1941) 168.

67 A Kagwa, The Customs of the Baganda (Columbia UP, 1934); Faupel (1965) 9; Thoonen (1941) 6-7, 30-31, 53, 102.
whose bluster and firepower were crucial to the eventual triumph of the Protestants and their British backers in the civil wars that ensued. Kagwa manœuvred himself into the position of Katikkiro (Prime Minister) of Buganda—a post that he held from 1890 to 1926, well into the period of the British Protectorate in Uganda. In the judgment of a recent revisionist biography of Mwanga by Ugandan historian Samwiri Lwanga-Lunyiigo, ‘just as Queen Elizabeth I had bestowed a knighthood on a notorious pirate, Francis Drake, so had King Edward VII bestowed a knighthood on Apolo Kagwa... Francis Drake delivered stolen Spanish gold and silver bullion and Apolo Kagwa delivered Buganda’s sovereignty’. In other words, the key ethnographic source on which missionaries relied to claim abhorrence of sodomy in Kiganda culture was produced by a figure deeply invested in Mwanga’s downfall.

Works by Kagwa and other elite Baganda suggest that sodomy was unknown in Kiganda culture until its introduction by Arab visitors to the court (a claim that mirrors contemporary claims of ‘import’ from the West). This mapping of sodomy as endemic amongst Arabs but unknown in sub-Saharan Africa is a familiar trope in the colonial archive. Yet the reproduction of this trope in elite Baganda texts comes with telling instabilities. Buried in the pages of James Miti’s unpublished ‘Short History of Buganda’ (1939) is a contrasting tale of two Arab imports, sodomy and gonorrhoea. Miti writes that when Mutesa I contracted gonorrhoea, it

became no longer a shameful thing to be infected with gonorrhoea; on the other hand, people foolishly prided themselves on having been infected with it. The disease was praised; and people encouraged it, just because it was a novel introduction and was so well spoken of. Gonococcal infection then came to be regarded as a mark of great daring and a means of earning respect from one’s fellow men. Lines such as

He is a fool who hath no gonorrhoea
He is a coward who this disease should fear


were frequently quoted and used by the people, and were even sung in public.\footnote{JK Miti, ‘A Short History of Buganda, Bunyoro, Busoga, Toro and Ankole’, trans. GK Rock, Makerere University archives, box number AR/BUG/66/2, 1939, 131-32.}

Evidently some Arab imports were eagerly embraced. Yet sodomy, which Miti condemns as an ‘immoral habit’, a ‘sin against nature’, and a ‘dirty game’ in two sentences with no further mention in an otherwise detailed description of the events leading up to the executions of 1886, was not one of these.\footnote{Ibid.} Why, if gonorrhoea became a mark of pride through its association with Mutesa despite its cultural inauthenticity, did sodomy not enjoy the same repute on the strength of its practice by Mwanga? And why does sodomy simply drop out of Miti’s account? Like Kagwa, Miti spent the early years of his life as a page in Mwanga’s court, surviving to write this history and enjoy a successful career in the employment of the British Protectorate and as a chief in the kingdom of Bunyoro, only because he had managed to escape the purges. His account of the escape is shot through with ambivalence. He speaks of returning to the scene of persecution because ‘we felt rather ashamed of ourselves in running away from and leaving our fellows to suffer death alone’.\footnote{Ibid 272.} And he pre-empts accusations of cowardice with the insistence that the survivors ‘suffered more by mental agony and apprehension by being left behind while all their fellows were taken away to the end of the sorrowful journey along which they had travelled’.\footnote{Ibid 287.} His account is infused with an anxiety that history will judge the survivors of the purges to have been less devout than those who perished on account of their refusal to abandon their faith. Thoonen provides additional perspective on this ambivalence with his insinuation that some of the pages were pardoned because they obeyed the king’s will.\footnote{Thoonen (1941) 187.} Whether this happened in Miti’s case is beside the point: to have dwelt on the sexual shenanigans of Mwanga’s court in this tale of survival might have invited unwelcome speculation about the reasons for which the survivor had been spared. Once again we encounter the erasure of native sodomy in what is essentially an autobiography of survival through imperial collaboration.

**Homophobia as decolonisation**

By a curious twist of fate, the Archbishop of Uganda who attended the 1998 Lambeth conference at which homosexuality was a key wedge issue between
clergy from the global North and South, is the descendant of a survivor of the purges of 1886. Livingstone Mpalityi Nkoyoyo is the grandson of Eriya Kagiri, a page in Mwanga’s court who was initially among the condemned Christians but received a last minute reprieve in recognition of his exemplary service to the Kabaka. When I asked Nkoyoyo, in an interview, about Mwanga’s alleged sexual proclivities, he shot back: ‘That is a bazungu story which Ugandans do not believe.’ This is ironic, given that bazungu (white foreigner) texts are still the foundation of official church memory, with extracts from the Catholic Faupel’s account still being read even at Anglican services today. Nkoyoyo’s account of the story, passed on from one generation to the next within his family, is in some ways a survivor narrative and may reproduce the silences that I have suggested are inherent in the logic of such narratives. I do not want to suggest that, as Archbishop, Nkoyoyo’s attitudes towards homosexuality were shaped purely or largely by his genealogy. Indeed Kevin Ward has argued, in his account of postcolonial Ugandan memory of the martyrdoms, that ‘Ugandans have not focused on the homosexual issue in the ways they have recalled and appropriated the story of the martyrs for the life of the Christian community. Rather, political questions of power and the limits of obedience have been fundamental: whether one’s first loyalty is to an earthly, possibly despotic, ruler, or to God, the King of the Universe.’ This framing has begun to change as a result of the increasing salience of homosexuality in global and local Ugandan politics, so that the story of the martyrs is now occasionally rendered as one in which brave Africans prefer to die rather than submit to sodomy. Indeed such an interpretation was also voiced by some of the African delegates to the 1998 Lambeth conference.

76 Author interview with Archbishop Livingstone Mpalityi Nkoyoyo, Kampala, 13 June 2012.
77 Participant observation at Uganda Martyrs’ Day service, Anglican shrine, Namugongo, 3 June 2012.
Although there are fewer Anglicans (36.6 per cent) than Catholics (41.6 per cent) in Uganda, the (Anglican) Church of Uganda has historically been the more powerful institution. Owing first to its association with the colonial power, this position of pre-eminence has continued into the postcolonial period in which eight of Uganda’s nine Presidents have been Anglican (the only exception being Idi Amin, who was Muslim). As such, the global politics of Anglicanism has had considerable impact on Uganda, particularly insofar as the issue of homosexuality is concerned. It is widely agreed that homosexuality was not of major concern to the Church of Uganda (or other Christian denominations within the country) until 1997 when African Anglican bishops, assisted by conservative US Episcopalians who were deeply concerned by the advance of LGBT rights in the West, convened a series of conferences to prepare for the 1998 Lambeth conference. Kaoma is right to point to the role of US conservatives in initiating attempts to forge global conservative positions on issues of sexuality. Yet as I suggested in the previous section, his argument begs questions about the reasons for the receptiveness of African clergy to this American advance.

In her account of this moment, Miranda Hassett draws attention to a dramatic reframing of Africa’s position in the Anglican Communion that helps us to understand this receptiveness. Long viewed as the troubled continent not only in Anglican circles but also, of course, in international politics more generally, ‘Africa’ was now courted by US conservatives as the solution to the problems that bedevilled the Communion. Hassett zeroes in on Stephen Noll, a key figure among the US Episcopal dissidents who, in the course of a speech attempting to persuade African clergy to take seriously an issue to which they had hitherto not devoted much attention, is reported to have said: ‘[i]t is crucial for the rest of the Anglican Communion to take notice and “come over and help us”. It has frequently been said in recent years that Third World Anglicans are in a much stronger place spiritually than Westerners’. As discussed earlier, African Anglicans did indeed assist conservative Episcopalians at the 1998 conference and in the years since, partly by voting in ways that ensured

84 Quoted in ibid 60.
that the conference would reject ‘homosexual practice as incompatible with Scripture’,85 and partly by providing ‘spiritual protection’ to secessionist Episcopalian parishes that now placed themselves under the oversight of African provinces.

These complex manoeuvres should interest those with no stake in Anglican politics on account of their startling dissonances with contemporaneous developments in (secular) international law and politics. We can read the Anglican debates over the constitutionality of questions such as the permissibility of intervention by bishops of one Anglican province in disputes between bishops and priests in another, as analogues of contemporaneous debates unfolding in secular arenas such as the United Nations over the permissibility of humanitarian intervention in the affairs of sovereign states. Yet the Anglican discourses evince a dramatically different imaginative geography. As Hassett elaborates:

[The] newly developed global-mindedness of the conservative Episcopal camp is surprising to many other Americans, who do not generally expect socially conservative white people to think, talk, and work in terms of greater relationships with the global South across racial and cultural boundaries. Social and moral conservatism in the United States tends to correlate with American exceptionalism, a view of the United States as a special nation with a unique global role—usually one of leading, teaching, and intervening in other nations. In contrast, Episcopal conservatives in the late 1990s were increasingly arguing that the Episcopal Church, and the United States in general, had a problem that needed intervention and correction from other nations—and not just any other nations, but the poor and marginalized nations of the global South.86

In contrast to conservative overtures to African clergy, liberal Episcopalian criticisms of African positions on sexuality tended to come across as patronising or even racist. Here is Nkoyoyo’s account, in his authorised biography, of the Lambeth debates around the ‘appalling proposal…seeking to approve of homosexuality as an alternative lifestyle’:

[S]ome bishops from western countries had a patronising attitude towards the African Church. On the one hand, they believed that Africans were incompetent in theological reflection and, therefore, not

qualified to contribute to the development of Anglican theology. An impression was being made that in the same way the African church received the faith from western churches, they were obliged to endorse the compromises that the western church had, in many places, taken on board against the teaching of the Holy Bible. [Nkoyoyo] recalls that there was also a general feeling that the African church was severely impoverished, and largely dependent upon western aid for her development activities. It was believed that this dependency did not give her the authority to take a strong stand in defence of the scriptures. The main question that he, and other Ugandan bishops anticipated was whether the belief and practice of the Anglican Communion would be based upon the teaching of the scriptures or whether it would be determined by the practices that had come to be accepted in western culture.

The Ugandan bishops settled this question with their conviction that Biblical truth was more important than money, that such truth had to be understood literally rather than through the lens of shifting cultural trends, and most importantly, that 'although the western Missionaries had planted the initial seed of the gospel, the seed had grown and matured to a status where the African church could state her own position and challenge any teaching that conflicted with the Holy Bible'. Homophobia, such as it is in this account, emerges as an almost incidental by-product of a more fundamental desire to assert the theological maturation and adulthood of a postcolonial African church. African delegates seem to have experienced the 1998 Lambeth conference—an imperial holdover in which they had previously exercised little voice—as a belated moment of decolonisation. Importantly, Hassett is herself ambivalent about this reading, and not simply because the formal egalitarianism of the Communion continues to be skewed—like every other realm of life—by the gross inequalities of international political economy. Her interviews with conservative US churchgoers in dissident Episcopalian parishes reveal a widely-held ‘noble savage’ view of African Christianity as ‘purer’ because less mediated by human interpretation than its morally compromised US counterpart. The subtext of this narrative is that Africans lack the capacity for such interpretation. Ironically, it is precisely this attitude that the Ugandan bishops found patronising in the liberal Episcopalians.

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88 Ibid 144.
Ugandan homophobia / homophobia in Uganda

Understanding the dexterousness of homophobic discourse, which allows it to accommodate itself to radically different political projects—imperial collaboration in one moment, decolonisation in another—can help us to appreciate the reasons for its hegemony. In both temporal moments, I have sought to emphasise the agency of Baganda/Ugandan elites in producing or harnessing homophobia for their political purposes. Focusing, as I do, on a narrow set of religious and political elites in both moments, my account of homophobia in Uganda is neither temporally nor sociologically comprehensive. Complementary arguments can, and have, been advanced from other vantage points. Focusing on present-day political elites most closely linked to the AHA, for example, one popular instrumentalist explanation for contemporary homophobia suggests that it serves the political interests of the ruling elite by diverting the attention of local and international publics from an increasingly dismal record of governance.90 Such instrumentalist explanations still face the burden of explaining why non-elites buy into a politics of distraction.

Recent work addressing this question has used the notion of ‘moral panics’ to explain why homophobic discourses resonate with non-elite audiences in Uganda.91 In these arguments, moral panics around issues such as homosexuality, pornography, prostitution, human sacrifice, witchcraft, drugs, alcohol and other social ‘vices’ reflect deeper social and material insecurities about the future. The pervasiveness of this sense of precarity is unsurprising in a society wracked by years of civil war, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, as well as the stresses of debt, structural adjustment and neoliberalism. Enter the figure of the queer, enabled by these shifting material configurations and newly interpellated by rights and identity discourses, providing a convenient scapegoat on whom the breakdown of traditional family structures can be blamed (notwithstanding Ugandan society’s actually existing flexibility in innovating a wide range of non-traditional family arrangements to meet these exigencies). In a society in which individual worth is measured in terms of participation in the institutions of marriage and childbearing, the sexually-individuated queer Ugandan is seen to pose a threat to mechanisms of control inherent in traditional kinship arrangements. Regarded as incapable of reproduction, queers are accused of recruiting children into homosexuality to swell their ranks. Indeed, deeply-rooted materialist understandings of (heterosexual) marriage and childrearing as


institutions for the control and transfer of property, generate an equally materialist homophobic discourse in which queers are understood as identifying in the ways that they do, not because they are performing some internal truth, but out of material considerations—namely, the promise of Western donor funds, which are then allegedly used to lure economically vulnerable Ugandans into homosexuality.

Such accounts take us further in understanding the resonance that homophobic discourses have with Ugandan audiences today. But notice what has happened to the location of homophobia in such arguments. I began this article with a series of representations of ‘African/Ugandan homophobia’, in which homophobia was (often implicitly) attributed to deep-rooted and primordial local cultural beliefs. I then surveyed arguments that treat homophobia as an imported discourse originating in the US culture wars, virtually absolving Ugandans of responsibility for the circulation of such virulent affects within their country. The current section problematised these understandings by revealing ‘Uganda’ as itself constituted through its encounters with Western and other external actors, but encounters in which Baganda/Ugandan elites play key roles. In the third set of explanations, homophobia once more comes to be attributed to Ugandans, but with a crucial difference. It is not simply that Ugandan and Western actors share responsibility for homophobia but rather, more significantly, that the kinds of explanations offered for homophobia in Uganda work equally well for the West.

Arguments from the relationship between moral panics and material precarity resonate strongly with D’Emilio’s classic essay on capitalism and gay identity in the West, which has unfortunately received far less attention in queer scholarship than Foucault’s discourse-centred explanation for the production of sexual identity.92 In D’Emilio’s account, capitalism enables the expression of sexuality (including non-normative sexualities) as an aspect of individual personhood by promoting the individuation of wage labour, thereby undermining traditional kinship arrangements. But capitalism has historically maintained an allegiance to heteronormativity in order to reproduce the next generation of workers: hence its alliance with socially conservative ‘family values’ agendas, for whom the feminist and the queer provide convenient scapegoats for the very forms of precarity for which capitalism is responsible. Insofar as this account resonates with scholarship tracing the links between moral panics and material precarity in contemporary Uganda, we must conclude that there is simply no such thing as ‘Ugandan homophobia’. The affects that travel under the sign of ‘homophobia’ in Uganda may well feature locally particular idioms (albeit

92 D’Emilio (1983).
significantly shaped by transnational evangelical propaganda), but their structural relations with material precarity bear a striking resemblance to those visible in the West. In this crucial respect at least, homophobia in Uganda is not significantly different from homophobia in the West.

POSTSCRIPT: THE DISPERSION OF PHOBIAS

The problem with teleological narratives of progress may not be the idea of improvement, so much as the singular yardstick by which it is measured. Contemporary observers of Uganda will be familiar with President Obama’s characterisation of the AHB as ‘odious’ and his condemnation of the murder of Ugandan kuchu activist David Kato. Few may be aware of an earlier interaction between the US and Uganda. In May 1963, when police in the state of Alabama were brutally suppressing black civil rights demonstrations, the leaders of 30 African states meeting in Ethiopia debated whether these events warranted a break in diplomatic relations with the US. In an open letter to President Kennedy, Ugandan Prime Minister Milton Obote condemned US hypocrisy and warned that ‘the eyes of the world are concentrated on Alabama’. Political theorist Mahmood Mamdani recounts his experience of being arrested while on a civil rights march as a young Ugandan student in the US. When he telephoned the Ugandan Ambassador from jail, the latter asked crossly ‘What are you doing interfering in the affairs of a foreign country?’ Mamdani: ‘What? We just got our independence! This is the same struggle. Have you forgotten?’ The reminder seems to have persuaded the Ambassador to secure Mamdani’s release. What sorts of imaginative geographies can make sense of the interventions of Ugandans such as Obote and Mamdani in US politics—interventions that in their own ways made possible the ascension to the US Presidency of an African American?

97 For an example of what such an imaginative geography might look like, see N Slate, Colored Cosmopolitanism: The Shared Struggle for Freedom in the United States and India (Harvard UP, 2012).
Ugandan kuchus are remaking these geographies in the course of their struggle against the AHA, in which legal strategies have been particularly important. The leading kuchu organisation Sexual Minorities Uganda (SM-UG) has successfully moved the High Court of Uganda to secure compensation for violations of basic human rights perpetrated by police and other agents of the state, and to obtain an injunction against the Ugandan tabloid *Rolling Stone* to stop its publication of homophobic stories inciting violence against the petitioners on account of their sexuality. It has been less successful at attempting to sue the Minister for Ethics and Integrity, Simon Lokodo, for his disruption in 2012 of a seminar organised by the lesbian organisation Freedom and Roam Uganda. In March 2014, a group of prominent Ugandan liberals from different walks of life, including kuchu activists, challenged the validity of the AHA on a variety of procedural and substantive grounds by filing suit in the Constitutional Court of Uganda. And in an earlier bold and innovative move in March 2012, SM-UG filed a lawsuit in a US federal court in Springfield, Massachusetts, against evangelical preacher Scott Lively, whom we encountered earlier as a key participant in the infamous Kampala seminar that preceded and influenced the drafting of the AHA. Filed under the US Alien Tort Statute, which allows non-US citizens to sue in US courts for violations of customary international law or a treaty to which the US is party, the suit alleges Lively’s participation in a conspiracy to persecute sexual minorities in Uganda on a scale sufficiently widespread and systematic to constitute a crime against humanity. The suit names a number of prominent Ugandans including pastors, MPs, and ministers as co-conspirators (but not co-defendants) with Lively.

In its legal and political campaign against the AHA, SM-UG demonstrates a keen awareness of the dispersion of homophobia, attributing responsibility for


the climate of hostility that it faces to a range of actors—state and non-state, political and religious, Ugandan and US. In addition, we can see in its pursuit of legal remedies in the US, a different kind of humanitarian intervention—one in which the putative objects of liberal international humanitarian benevolence intervene, in their own interest, in the politics of their putative rescuer. One of the unremarked-upon ironies of US-Uganda interactions over the AHA is that the US executive, intensely preoccupied with the question of how it can pressure the Ugandan government into withdrawing this draconian legislation, seems precluded from preventing the export of homophobic hatred from its territory by its constitutional obligation to respect the free speech of its citizens. In pursuing their case against Lively, Ugandan kuchus not only forego dependence on an unreliable rescuer (the US executive) but also call into question its self-projection as agent of benevolence.

The reality of ‘dispersion’ can also be illustrated with reference to a map that is strikingly different from the ILGA map discussed at the beginning of this article. The Trans Murder Monitoring Project collects and analyses reports of homicides of trans people worldwide. Its 2013 update reports that in the 12 months between November 2012 and November 2013, the highest absolute numbers of trans murders were recorded in Brazil, Mexico, the US and Venezuela, with high numbers relative to population size recorded in Honduras, El Salvador, Brazil and Mexico.103 The report is accompanied by a map, which uses familiar visual strategies to signal places of highest reported violence by colouring them red. On this map, North America and Latin America are red. The report cautions that the paradox of the highest numbers of trans murders being reported from countries with the strongest trans movements raises worrying questions about unreported cases: in other words, the high numbers may be a sign of progress, an indication of the increasing social recognition of violence against trans people and the seriousness with which this is now treated.

This is certainly correct, but there might be other reasons for the very different message of this map. The politics of sexual orientation (with which this article has been concerned) and gender identity (which I have not discussed at all) are frequently highly divergent, notwithstanding their amalgamation in categories such as ‘LGBT’ and ‘SOGI’. Countries like Iran, for example, harshly criminalise non-normative sexual orientation while evincing greater legal

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(even if not social) tolerance of transsexuality.\textsuperscript{104} Homophobia and transphobia are neither identical nor coincidental, even if they frequently accompany one another. The question of whether and why places with high levels of homophobia may not experience similar levels of transphobia, and vice versa, is too complex to do justice to here. For now I would simply note that something interesting happens when the trans murder map is superimposed on ILGA’s gay and lesbian rights map: virtually the whole world turns red. The dark side of Aimé Césaire’s stirring insistence that ‘no race has a monopoly of beauty, intelligence, strength’\textsuperscript{105} must surely be that no place has a monopoly on ugliness, stupidity, weakness.

Note: Shortly before this article went to press, on 1 August 2014, the Ugandan Constitutional Court struck down the Anti Homosexuality Act on the procedural ground that it was passed without the requisite parliamentary quorum.


\textsuperscript{105} A Césaire, Return to My Native Land, trans. E Snyders (Présence Africaine, 1968) 125.